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ZERO YEAR
FINAL ACT

BATMAN™

THE NEW 52!

75 YEARS OF BATMAN

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"WHAT IS THAT CIRCLE OF FIRE?"

I SWEAR, THAT'S HOW YOU LOOKED AT THE *SUN* AS A BABY IN GOTHAM, *LUKE.*

YOU WERE AN EARLY RISER. SO I'D TAKE YOU FOR THESE WALKS AROUND MIDTOWN BEFORE YOUR MOTHER WOKE UP. I CALLED THEM OUR *WALKABOUTS.*

MOST DAYS, THE SKY WAS GRAY AND *STAYED* GRAY. BUT ONCE IN A WHILE THE SUN WOULD APPEAR, SO BRIGHT AND SUDDEN, AND YOU'D LOOK AT IT WITH THIS EXPRESSION...*Heh.*

TODAY I'M GOING TO CHALLENGE THE *RIDDLER,* LUKE. I'VE PUT IT OFF TOO LONG. I DOUBT I'LL SURVIVE, BUT I HAVE TO *TRY.*

FULL DISCLOSURE: I'M *TERRIFIED.* BUT RIGHT NOW, AT THIS MOMENT, WITH THE SUNLIGHT BRIGHT ON MY FACE, THINKING OF YOU...I FEEL...

...I FEEL AT *PEACE.*

...

THEN AGAIN, SUNLIGHT'S *OVERRATED.*

HE ACTS LIKE HIS CHALLENGE IS TO BEAT HIM IN A BATTLE OF ***WITS,*** THERE IN THE COLISEUM, BUT IT'S ***NOT.***

WHAT HE'S REALLY CHALLENGING US TO DO IS TO ***CATCH HIM.*** FIND HIS HIDING SPOT.

THERE'RE A MILLION AND A HALF PLACES HE COULD BE, THOUGH.

HELL, ***BATMAN,*** COULDN'T HE BE ***ACROSS*** THE RIVER?

NO, LIEUTENANT...

...THE SIPHON ***THE RIDDLER'S*** USING TO CONTROL THE GRID, IT'S NOT DESIGNED FOR THAT. IT'S AN INFILTRATION GRAB.

HE'S SOMEWHERE ***INSIDE*** THE CITY.

THE TRICK IS FIGURING OUT ***WHERE.***

IT WON'T BE EASY, THOUGH. HE'S USING THE DEVICE UNCONVENTIONALLY. ONLY LONG ENOUGH TO SEND A SIGNAL BOUNCING THROUGH THE GRID. TURNING SOMETHING ON, THEN OFF.

WHY?

HE LEAVES A LINE ON TOO LONG, AND IT COULD BE TRACED BACK TO ITS SIGNAL ***ORIGIN.***

MR. FOX, YOU HELPED DEVELOP THE SIPHON HE'S USING TO CONTROL THE GRID. CAN YOU CREATE A ***DEVICE*** TO ***TRACE*** THE SIGNAL HE'S USING?

I HAVE SOMETHING I COULD MODIFY HERE. A PIN. BUT IT'S HARDLY ANY USE, BATMAN.

IT WOULD NEED TO BE HOOKED UP TO THE LINE HE WAS USING. DIRECTLY PLUGGED IN. WE'D HAVE TO KNOW ***WHEN AND WHERE*** HE WAS GOING TO TURN ON THE POWER, AND--

WE ***DO.***

STILL, EVEN IF WE HOOK IT UP TO THE SCREEN, IT'LL TAKE A WHILE, ***TEN MINUTES,*** MAYBE MORE, TO TRACE THE SIGNAL. NYGMA'S NEVER STAYED ONLINE MORE THAN A COUPLE ***MINUTES.*** HE MAKES QUICK WORK OF EVERYONE WHO STEPS UP.

AND YET, ***YOU*** WERE GOING TO ***CHALLENGE*** HIM, LUCIUS.

I WAS GOING TO ***TRY.*** I FIGURED IF I LOST THAT WAY, IT'D JUST BE ME. YOU KNOW IF HE DISCOVERS WHAT WE'RE DOING, HE MIGHT PUNISH THE ***CITY.***

...

HE'LL PUNISH IT ONE WAY OR ANOTHER. HE'S ***WAITING*** FOR AN EXCUSE.

WE HAVE TO TRY.

JIM--YOU HOOK UP THE DEVICE. MR. FOX, YOU TRACE THE SIGNAL FROM HERE. THE ***SEALS*** HERE CAN PROTECT YOU. I'LL KEEP NYGMA TALKING.

YOU KEEP HIM TALKING, BUT THE MOMENT YOU THINK HE'S GOING TO DROP YOU, YOU BETTER ***MOVE.*** THAT PIT BENEATH THE COLISEUM...HE KEEPS ***JACKALS*** IN IT.

THERE'S NO WINNING DOWN THERE, BATMAN.

I'LL KEEP THE ENGINE RUNNING. WE HAVE UNTIL ***SUNSET*** TO GET READY. I'LL BE BACK.

WHERE THE HELL ARE YOU GOING?!

SHOPPING.

->*Sigh*<-

"SHOPPING."

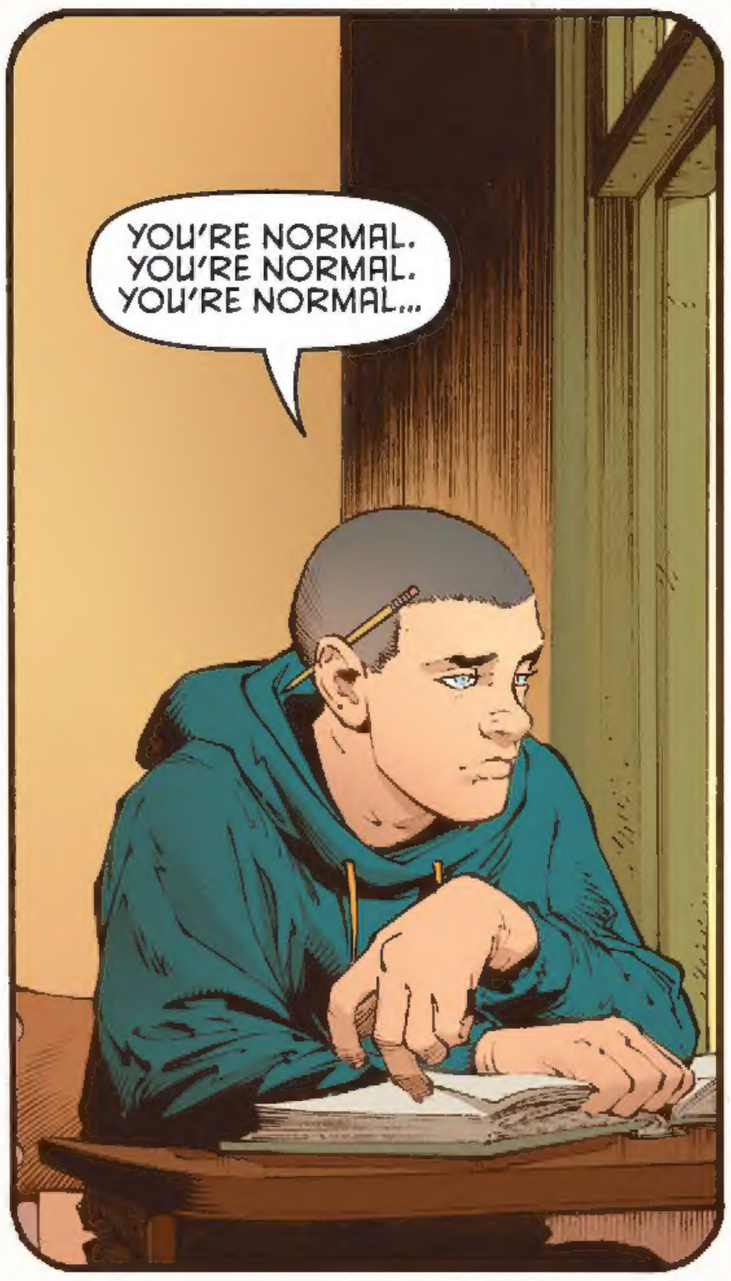
WHAT'S THAT ***BURNING*** SMELL?

HE USED YOUR ***STEEL CUTTER*** EARLIER.

TO MAKE WHAT?

JIM, TO MAKE ***WHAT?***

...REALLY?



BRUCE! BRUCE WAYNE! YOU'VE SAID NOTHING IN DAYS. CONSIDER THIS YOUR PROBLEM. YOURS AND YOURS ALONE.
ONLY YOU CAN SOLVE IT. NO ONE ELSE.
?

ZERO YEAR

SAVAGE CITY

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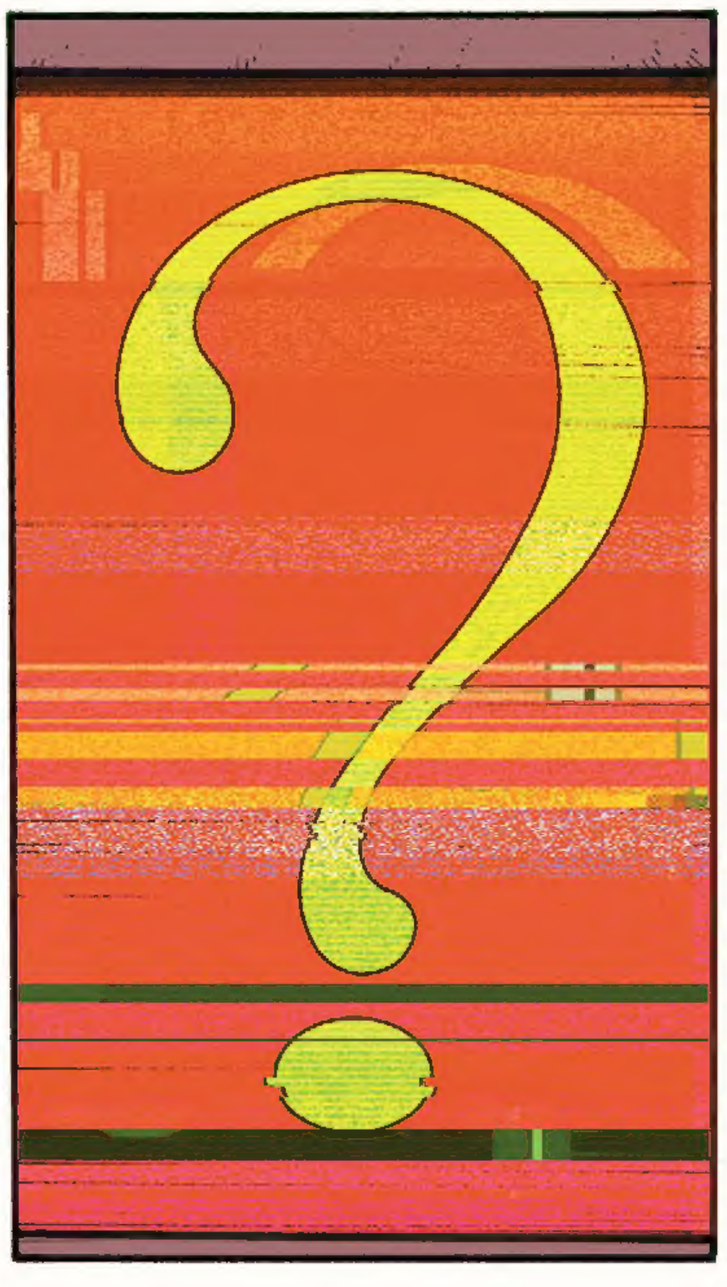
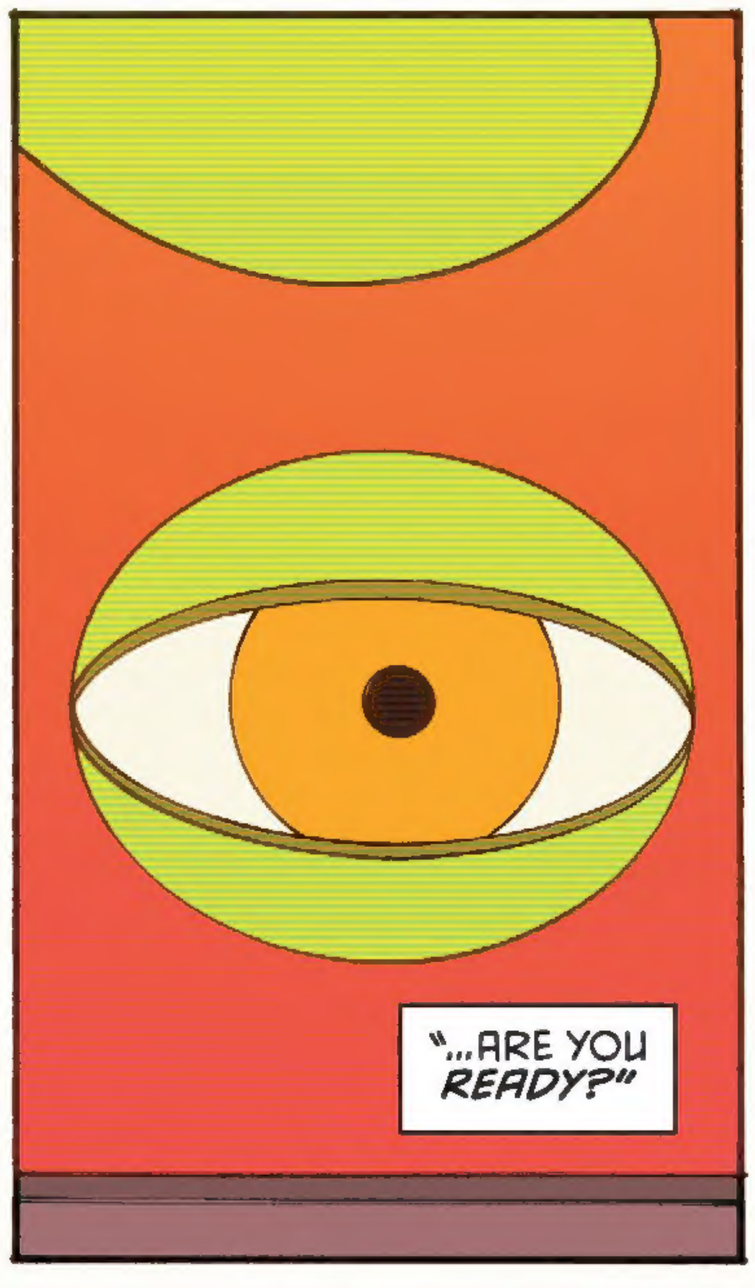




GREETINGS, GOTHAMITES!

IT'S NOW OFFICIALLY **DAY TWENTY-SEVEN** OF ZERO YEAR! WE'VE TRAVELED NEARLY SIX HUNDRED AND FORTY-EIGHT THOUSAND KILOMETERS TOGETHER, SPINNING AND SPINNING, YOU AND I, HURTLING FORWARD THROUGH THIS NEW ERA!

NEARLY OUR FIRST CALENDAR MONTH IS OVER! HECK, I SAY IT'S TIME FOR US TO **MAKE** A CALENDAR! SOMETHING NEW! NON-ARITHMETICAL, INCOMPLETE...SOMETHING OF OUR VERY **OWN!** WHAT DO YOU SAY?

OH, COME ON NOW. IT'LL BE **FUN!** YOU CAN EVEN NAME THE MONTHS AFTER YOUR VERY OWN **HEROES!**

BOBVEMBER! SUZANUARY!

ANYONE BRAVE ENOUGH TO HELP SAVE THIS PLACE FROM ITS OWN ENCROACHING ENTROPIC END?!

SO...WHO WILL IT BE? **ANYONE?!**

"AND HERE HE THOUGHT THIS WAS THE CITY OF KNIGHTS..."

...FOR SHAME! ISN'T THAT YOUR **SPORTING** TEAM? THE KNIGHTS? COME NOW, **SIR GOTHAM,** WHOEVER YOU ARE...

"...CHOOSE YOUR COLORS!"

CHOOSE YOUR COLORS OR I'LL HAVE TO **TAX** THIS KINGDOM MORE HARSHLY. I DON'T WANT TO, BELIEVE ME, BUT I **WILL.** SO...

VRRRRR

"...FLY YOUR COLORS HIGH, MOUNT YOUR STEED..."

...AND CHARGE...?

VRRRRROOOM

...WHAT **IS** THAT AWFUL NOISE, PEOPLE?

SCREEE

I'LL CHALLENGE YOU, EDWARD.

WELL, ME OH MY. **BATMAN!** I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW PLEASED I AM YOU'RE STILL **ALIVE!**

YOU'VE HELD THESE PEOPLE IN FEAR TOO LONG. YOUR SO-CALLED "ZERO YEAR" ENDS NOW.

TONIGHT.

ALL RIGHT, BATMAN...

THIS LINE SHOULD BE ARMORED AND ARMED. KEEP NYGMA TALKING, BATMAN, BUT REMEMBER, IF IT FEELS LIKE HE'S GOING TO DROP YOU, MOVE. MOVE ***FAST.***

JIM, ARE YOU IN PLACE?

ALMOST THERE, LUCIUS.

I MUST SAY, BATMAN! I'M POSITIVELY **GIDDY** RIGHT NOW! AFTER ALL, MY SENSE OF YOU IS THAT YOU'RE A **BOOKISH** MAN BENEATH THAT COAT OF MUSCLES.

A WORLDLY, **THINKING** MAN! SO I GENUINELY CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT RIDDLE YOU'LL **RIDDLE ME** TONIGHT! MAYBE A **BAT** RIDDLE FROM ANTIQUITY...?

...PERHAPS FROM **ANCIENT GREECE,** THE LAND OF AESOP'S FABLES AND THE **TRICKSTER BAT...?**

...OR MAYBE A RIDDLE FROM THE **ANCIENT MAYANS,** WHO WORSHIPPED **CAMAZOTZ,** THE NOGGIN-MUNCHING **BAT GOD?**

OR POSSIBLY ONE FROM THE MONSTROUSLY BAT-OBSESSED REGION OF THE **CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS!**

WELL, "BAT" MAN, GO AHEAD! RIDDLE AWAY! I'M ALL EARS!

ACTUALLY, MY RIDDLE IS FROM RIGHT ***HERE.*** IN GOTHAM CITY.

HA-HAAA! SPLENDID! HOMESPUN! HOW QUAINT! A RIDDLE OF YOUR VERY OWN!

HOOKING IT UP NOW.

WE'RE IN. I'VE GOT A SIGNAL...

HOW LONG?

DAMMIT! **NINETEEN MINUTES** AT LEAST. IT'S A THICKER CASING THAN I EXPECTED. BATMAN, YOU SHOULD--

WELL, BATMAN... I'M **WAITING.**

BATMAN, YOU'LL NEVER--

ENOUGH.

ALL RIGHT, EDWARD. BUT I'M AFRAID MY RIDDLE IS PRETTY ***SIMPLE.***

THEN THIS'LL BE FAST AND I CAN PUT THAT CAPE OF YOURS BACK ON THE SPIT, EH? SPEAKING OF WHICH, HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO--

IT STARTS WITH A ***BOY,*** MY RIDDLE.

A ***BOY,*** EH? LET ME GUESS. ONE DAY, HE'S STANDING IN THE CENTER OF HIS VILLAGE, AND--

NOW, NOW, EDWARD... IF YOU WANT ME TO TELL YOU THIS RIDDLE...

BATMAN, LISTEN, YOU NEED TO--

YOU'LL ***SHUT UP.*** AND LET ME TELL IT.

BATMAN, HE'S RIGHT, NINETEEN MINUTES IS--

DAMMIT. *A DRONE.* IT'S BLOCKING MY WAY DOWN, LUCIUS!

*LIKELY IT SENSES A DISRUPTION IN THE LINE. STAY STILL. IT DOESN'T SEEM TO **SEE** YOU!*

ALL RIGHT, EDWARD...

...LIKE I SAID, MY RIDDLE STARTS WITH A BOY. NOW THIS BOY, HE'S SMART. ***DAZZLINGLY SMART.*** HE SEES THINGS MOST PEOPLE CAN'T.

THE THING IS, NO ONE SEEMS TO ***NOTICE.*** NOT HIS TEACHERS. NOT HIS PEERS. NOT EVEN HIS PARENTS.

SO BEFORE LONG, THIS BOY, NOW A TEENAGER, STARTS ***PROVING*** IT. HE BREAKS INTO CORPORATE DATA BANKS, GOVERNMENT SAFE-BLOCKS. STILL, NO ONE SEEMS TO ***APPRECIATE*** HIM.

SEVENTEEN MINUTES.

NOW HE'S A ***MAN.*** HE WORKS FOR SOME OF THE MOST POWERFUL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, BUT ***STILL...*** NO ONE SEEMS TO NOTICE HOW SMART HE IS.

HE CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT. SO HE GETS LOUDER AND ***LOUDER,*** PEACOCKING.

HE'S THIS AMAZING THING, THIS ***HUMAN RIDDLE*** TO BE MARVELED AT, BUT NO ONE SEES IT, DAMMIT!

AND ***WHY?***

BECAUSE WHAT HE CAN'T SEE, WHAT HE'LL ***NEVER*** SEE, IS THAT PEOPLE NOTICE SMART WHEN SMART CHANGES THE WORLD. WHEN IT ***ADDS*** SOMETHING.

BUT THIS MAN, ALL HE CARES ABOUT IS ***HIMSELF.*** HE ISN'T COMPLICATED. HE'S NO RIDDLE. HE'S JUST A BOY, STANDING AT THE CENTER OF HIS VILLAGE, SCREAMING, *"LOOK AT ME."* ***EMBARRASSING*** HIMSELF IN A CHEAP HAT.

THE HAT WASN'T CHEAP, BATMAN, BUT YOU WANT TO PLAY COUCH DOCTOR? ALL RIGHT.

*UNDER THAT MASK AND COWL IS JUST A MAN, A MAN WHO **USED** TO AFFECT THINGS, **USED** TO BE PART OF THE FIGHT. THE TRAINING SUGGESTS **MILITARY** EXPERIENCE. A MARINE. A SEAL. SPECIAL OPS.*

*SOMEONE RETURNED HOME FROM SANDY LANDS, NOW FEELING PUT OUT TO PASTURE. LIKELY WITH A HISTORY OF INSUBORDINATION, MAYBE A SECTION EIGHT... A DISCARDED **WEAPON...***

...WELL? I'M RIGHT, AREN'T I?

Heh. NOT EVEN CLOSE.

WHY DON'T YOU TRY AGAIN?

BECAUSE I DON'T **BELIEVE** YOU. IN FACT, I FIND THIS A WASTE OF TIME...

GET *OUT* OF THERE, BATMAN. FAST!

BATMAN, YOU CAN STILL--

TIME LEFT?

ELEVEN MINUTES. PLEASE, GET **OUT** OF THERE! WE'LL FIND ANOTHER--

NO. DO. YOUR. JOB.

HAPPY *LANDINGS*, BATMAN!

HE DROPPED HIM! JIM, YOU NEED TO--

I NEED TO *HELP* HIM!

IF THAT THING SEES YOU, NYGMA WILL KNOW WHAT WE'RE UP TO! YOU **CAN'T** CLIMB DOWN NOW!

THEN I'LL HAVE TO TAKE THE EXPRESS ELEVATOR...

JIM? JIM, WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?

WELL, GOTHAMITES, I'M AFRAID THAT **CONCLUDES** ANOTHER--

WHAT'S THE MATTER, NYMGA?

AFRAID TO SEE YOUR MOUSETRAP ***BEATEN?!*** KEEP WATCHING. YOU MIGHT ***LEARN*** SOMETHING!

Heh. ALL RIGHT, THEN. YOU WANT ME TO WATCH? I'LL WATCH. BUT I HAVE TO **WARN** YOU, BATMAN...

...I'VE UPGRADED FROM JACKALS.

IT'S A LITTLE-KNOWN FACT THAT A LION'S ROAR CAN BE HEARD FOR NEARLY FIVE MILES. THE HUMAN **SCREAM**, MORE LIKE TWO.

DEEP BREATHS, BATMAN. DEEP BREATHS.

"THERE IS NO ESCAPING THIS, MR. WAYNE..."

...YOU'RE SIMPLY GOING TO HAVE TO *ANSWER THE QUESTION.*

SO, AGAIN, IF A PROJECTILE IS FIRED AT THE SPEED GIVEN...

...IF IT'S FIRED...AND *HITS* ITS INTENDED TARGET...?

...

IF IT HITS ITS INTENDED TARGET AT THE TIME GIVEN, HOW MUCH *WIND RESISTANCE* DID IT ENCOUNTER?

MR. CHARMOUTH, PLEASE...JUST PICK SOMEONE *ELSE.*

IF A PROJECTILE IS FIRED AT SAID SPEED, AND HITS AT SAID TIME, WHAT RESISTANCE DOES IT ENCOUNTER? *PICTURE* IT, MR. WAYNE, IF IT HELPS...

PICK. SOMEONE. ELSE.

NO. THE OBJECT IS MOVING THROUGH SPACE TOWARDS ITS TARGET...

?

...COME ON, MR. WAYNE. NO ONE IS LEAVING UNTIL YOU ANSWER THE *QUESTION.* YOUR CLASSMATES ARE WAITING ON YOU. LOOK AT THEM. GO ON. *DO IT.*

GO ON! *LOOK!*

LOOK AT THESE POOR SOULS, MR. WAYNE. WAITING FOR YOU TO SET THEM *FREE!*

PLEASE...

DEFINITELY NO MONTH NAMED AFTER YOU, BATMAN. NOT A CHANCE, AFTER SUCH A POOR PERFORMANCE. SIGH, SIGH...

"YOU CAN'T *RUN AWAY* FROM THIS, MR. WAYNE...

"...*YOU* CAN'T HIDE.

SEVEN MINUTES!

"WELL, GO ON...

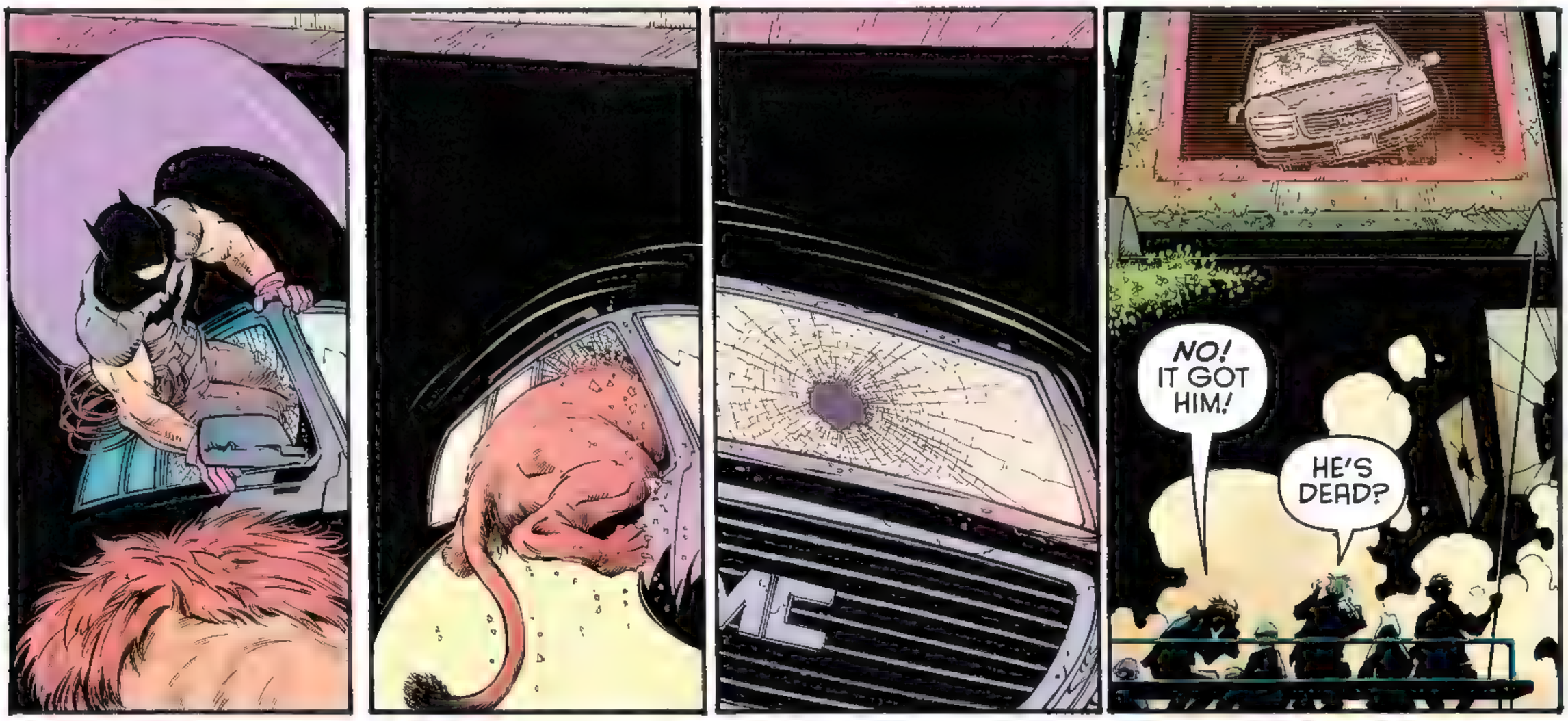
...YOU CAN'T DO IT, THEN?

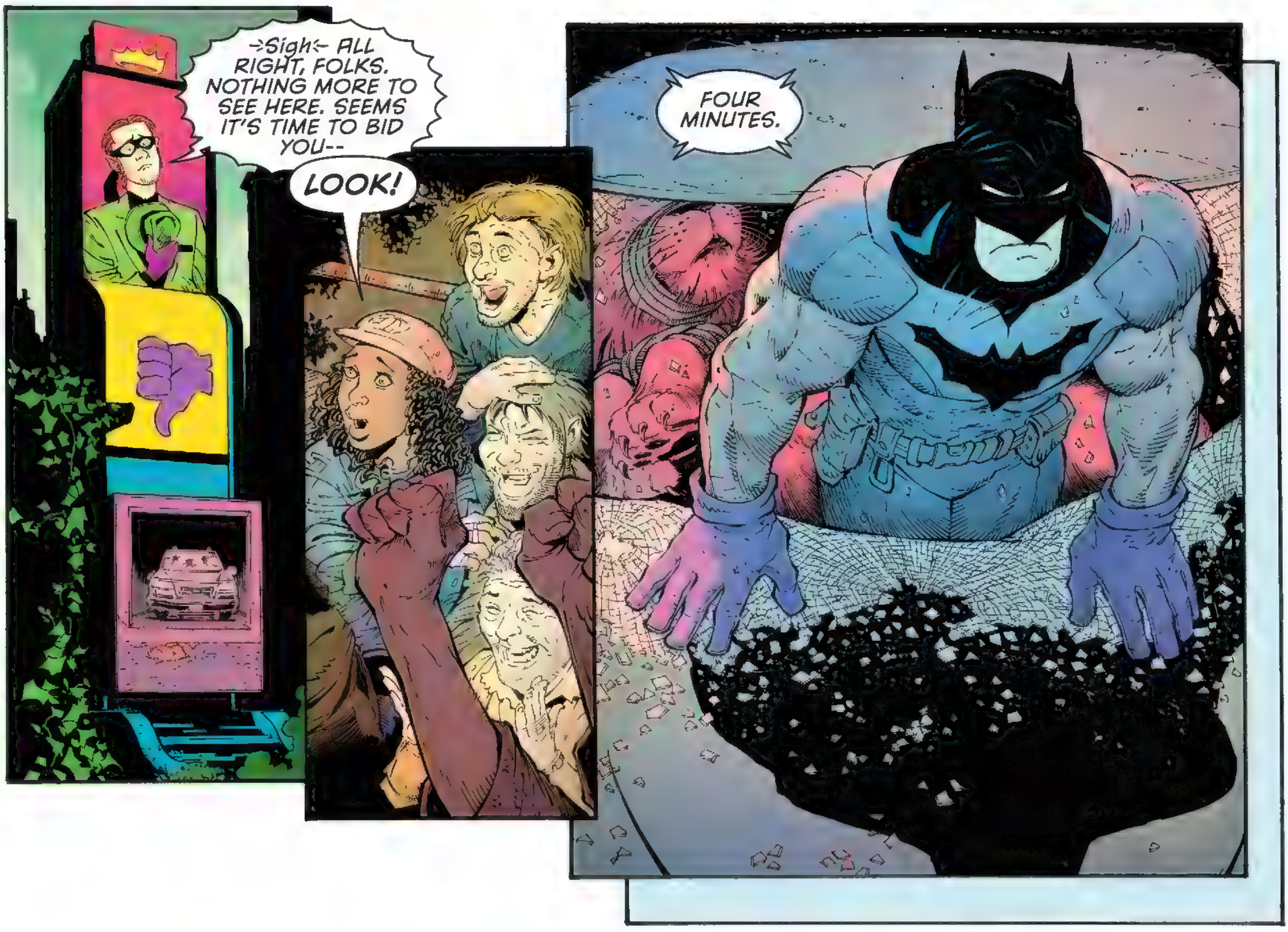
"YOU CAN'T *HELP* THEM?

"SHAME ON YOU, BRUCE...

"...SHAME..."

SIX MINUTES.


NO! IT GOT HIM!
HE'S DEAD?


-Sigh- ALL RIGHT, FOLKS. NOTHING MORE TO SEE HERE. SEEMS IT'S TIME TO BID YOU--
LOOK!
FOUR MINUTES.

ALL RIGHT, THEN...

TWO MINUTES.

STAY. GOOD KITTY.

I'VE GOT ONE LAST *QUESTION* FOR YOU, EDWARD...

"...AND WHAT I WANT YOU TO ANSWER..."

ONE MINUTE.

"...WHAT I REALLY WANT TO *KNOW*, IS..."

...IS THAT ALL YOU'VE *GOT?*

IS IT?!

HE *DID* IT! WE'VE GOT THE PATTERN! THAT CRAZY SON OF A GUN DID IT!

*LUCKILY, NO, BATMAN. IT'S **NOT** ALL I'VE GOT. I'VE GOT RIDDLES. **LOTS.** HERE'S ONE...*

*...EVERYONE'S ATTRACTED TO ME. EVERYONE FALLS FOR ME, EVENTUALLY. EVEN **YOU,** BATMAN.*

WHO AM I?

GRAAK!

GRAVITY.

BLAM

BATMAN! COME ON! *THIS WAY!*

WHAT... WHAT'S GOING ON? THIS IS *MY* HOUSE.

STAY BACK, SIR. FIRE DEPARTMENT IS ON THE WAY. SEEMS SOMEONE VANDALIZED YOUR PROPERTY TONIGHT. ANY IDEA WHAT THIS MEANS?

...

SIR, DOES IT *MEAN* SOMETHING TO YOU?

YES, IT...IT REFERS TO A *QUESTION* I ASKED TODAY IN CLASS. A *TRICK* QUESTION.

REFERS TO IT *HOW?*

IT'S THE *ANSWER*...THE ANSWER...

...IS *ZERO.*

NEXT: THE PENULTIMATE CHAPTER OF ZERO YEAR!

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SUPERMAN

#32

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JUNE 2014

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—COMIC BOOK RESOURCES

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